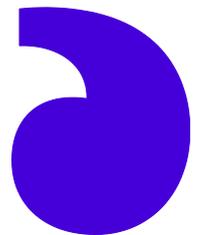




Making sure people with a learning disability are able to make a complaint about GP services



January 2015



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Healthwatch Worcestershire has a statutory role to make recommendations to publicly funded health and social care services, based on feedback we receive from the public. We are also able to formally request a response from services about our reports and recommendations.

To understand improvement needed, it is vital that GPs listen to feedback and complaints of those who use the service. It can be difficult to raise an issue or make a complaint if you do not know how to do it or do not feel that you will be listened to. This can be even more difficult for people with a learning disability.

We met with 39 adults with a learning disability, all members of SpeakEasy N.O.W. to talk about their understanding of how to make a complaint and if they felt able to do so.

- Only 7 people out of 39 said they thought they knew how to make a complaint about their GP practice.
- Although they told us about many things they had been unhappy about with their GP practices, no one had ever made a complaint.
- Many said that they were worried no one would listen and that nothing would happen as a result.

People also said they worried they would not be taken seriously because of their learning disability, that they didn't want people to be angry with them, they didn't want to offend anyone, they might be fobbed off and that people might think they were just making a nuisance.

People said that they would feel *worried, scared, upset, afraid* and *not confident* about making a complaint.

Some felt that people with a learning disability may not know that they are able to make a complaint. They may feel that this could just be done by a carer or supporter, if this is who the GP staff talk to rather than directly to them.

GP surgeries need to make sure that everyone, including people with a learning disability are given clear information about how to make a complaint. They also need to consider how to make sure people feel able to raise their concerns and reassure them that they will be listened to.

The group told us that there needs to be information in Easy Read about how to complain. The information needs to clearly explain the stages of making a complaint in easy words with pictures.

They said that not everyone will be able to write down their complaint and that there need to be different options, such as arranging a meeting or speaking on the phone. It is also important that information responding to a complaint is given in a way that people can understand and there needs to be support available to make a complaint if people need it.

In 2014 NHS England ran a consultation about their standard: Making Health and Social Care Information Accessible, which is due to come into effect later in 2015. The standard states that health services must provide information in a format that people can understand, such as Easy Read. This will mean that GP surgeries will have a responsibility to provide Easy Read information about their complaints process.

Working with the CCGs, SpeakEasy N.O.W. have developed a template for an Easy Read complaints leaflet for GP surgeries. It enables practices to enter their own details and photos as appropriate. With support from the Learning Disability Primary Care Liaison Nurse this has now been sent to all GPs in Worcestershire. GPs should recognise the importance of making this information available.

The NHS England standard about making information accessible also states that services have a responsibility to provide additional support, if people need it due to a disability, to help them understand information. This could include having support with understanding how to complain and what the outcome of the complaint has been. GPs ought to ensure that patients receive access to and information about advocacy services, who can provide independent support to make a complaint about health services.

The main focus of the feedback the group gave us about their own GPs was about how well they thought their GPs and other practice staff explained things in a way

they could understand and spoke directly to them rather than to a carer or supporter. This highlights the importance of effective communication and appropriate understanding of learning disabilities.

Recommendations

<p>1. GP practices in Worcestershire should have an understanding of their responsibilities relating to the NHS England standard: Making Health and Social Care Information Accessible.</p>	<p>NHS England GP Practices</p>
<p>2. GP practices should be using the leaflet template to create their own Easy Read ‘How to Complain’ leaflet.</p>	<p>GP Practices</p>
<p>3. GP practices should raise awareness of complaints process with their patients with a learning disability, such as giving out Easy Read leaflets at appointments or Annual Health Checks.</p>	<p>GP Practices</p>
<p>4. GP practices should raise awareness of advocacy support available to support people to make a complaint</p>	<p>GP Practices</p>
<p>5. GP practices to send their response to this report and the recommendations to Healthwatch Worcestershire.</p>	<p>GP Practices</p>
<p>6. Healthwatch Worcestershire will create an Easy Read versions of our guides: How to Complain about Health Services in Worcestershire and How to Complain about Social Care Services in Worcestershire.</p>	<p>Healthwatch Worcestershire</p>